

Against the Grain

Volume 23 | Issue 2

Article 28

April 2011

@Brunning: People & Technology -- At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

Dennis Brunning

Arizona State University, dennis.brunning@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brunning, Dennis (2011) "@Brunning: People & Technology -- At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 23: Iss. 2, Article 28.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5805>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

At the Only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Annals of Search: Search Shenanigans

Bing's search goal is to not produce nonsense; **Bing** figures you need what you need in the right amount and right for your decision making. **Google's** goal — well, it used to be to do no evil or organize the world's knowledge.

To librarians none of this sounds good enough, hardly reaching our search goals. Who knew that it would become a consumer concern and a **Google** problem extraordinaire.

Recently **Google** took major steps to correct a thorny issue. Project Panda, through clever engineering, was going to blacklist content farms and other Websites that game **Google's** rules. These sites often come out top in search results. **Google** feels trust is at stake.

Users trust **Google** to give them relevant results for least effort. A few keywords and you are off and running — booking that cruise, buying that car, contributing to that candidate. Used to be we thought users didn't go beyond page three. Today, it's more like the third entry.

To be in that holy trinity cost e-commerce companies dearly, especially in search engine optimization (SEO) costs. They also will pay high prices for sponsored links — those on the right side of the page and more than ever on top of the page.

If you don't play this game, you need to be lucky, if you know what **Google** means.

A whole content industry developed around how **Google** selected and displayed results. Creative people in SEO, search engine optimization, wrote, plagiarized, data mined whatever words they could to promote their sites. These content farms were chock full of ads, displayed in the hope that users would click on them.

Just last month, **Google** acted. They put into effect new search rules to reduce content farms search impact. The big losers in this could be **Demand Media** where writers toil often at fewer than a few cents an hour to produce sticky content.

As librarians, we could just roll our eyes and prattle on about the limits of consumer search. Unfortunately, we are struggling to maintain our research tools in the face of a new generation of users who know nothing more than **Google** has to offer.

The takeaway: those search engine users who understand **Google's** problem are savvy enough to understand what library search engines offer. We need to tell them this story. There are no content cows at the library search farm.

Your Links:

<http://blog.searchenginewatch.com/110310-154741>

<http://blog.searchenginewatch.com/110310-175043>

<http://www.searchenginecafe.com/2011/03/googles-war-on-content-farms-project.html>

Downloads from the ZeitGeist

Digital doubt: (AKA: net delusion, the shallows, "you are not a gadget") the thought, like a shadow presence, that we've gone overboard with the online thing. We are just overwhelmed. Explored in new indie movies — "Beautifully Moving Parts," and "American Animal," each film, in its own way, goes off-line to connect, asking "does all this connectedness make you happy?"

continued on page 58

The Atlas of New Librarianship

R. David Lankes

"Deep thinking, beyond brands, down to the core concepts and competencies that define librarian-



ship. Lankes creates thoroughly described verbal and visual explanations of the relationships between the many disparate parts that make up our professional whole."

— Jessamyn West, community technology librarian,

blogger, and creator of librarian.net

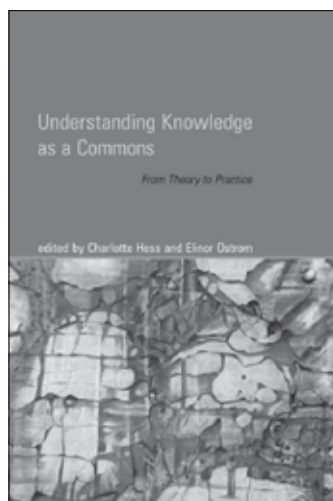
Copublished with the Association of College and Research Libraries
448 pp., 243 illus., \$55 cloth

Understanding Knowledge as a Commons

From Theory to Practice

edited by Charlotte Hess and Elinor Ostrom

"On the whole this book provides an excellent introduction to the theory and practice of knowledge



commons. ...The writing is uniformly lucid. The book deserves to be read widely, especially by academics and librarians."

— Subbiah Arunachalam, *Current Science*

84 pp., 8 illus., \$20 paper

Executable paper: Elsevier putting up prize money for those among us who can figure out a more fungible publishing format — pdf that integrates multimedia, gaming, communication. The new STM DRM?

Googlization: as in “of everything” Bon mot that puts the joy and sorrow of the search engine’s influence on us.

Hindawi: one of the leading open access publishers, has sold off-spring to **Springer**. May be cause for a new verb — “hindawied” as in “we hindawied those to a major publisher.”

Hathi Trust: Another Hindu word... The trust has gone prime time with new members, great search engine, easy deposit of repository objects. Should we coin a new term “reposit”? Question: where are those scanned copies **Google** gave you? Trust us, we want to know.

E Shelf Life: **HarperCollins** rediscovers the shelf, originally a physical place — to introduce limits on how many times you can use an eBook before extra fees are charged. What, there is wear and tear on the digital binding?

DBpedia: a wiki sibling to be sure, is a community effort to extract structured information from **Wikipedia** and to make this information available on the Web. A better **Wikipedia** it seems; make sure you capitalize the first two letters.

etextbook: textbooks have been online for a while, they just lacked a portable reader. With all the devices in-hand these days, textbook publishers like **Pearson** and **Macmillan** are now extremely enthused about them. However, these aren’t going to be just the imaged print; multimedia, interactivity, game simulations are all part of the mix. The better the mix, the higher the price?

Gonegoogle: **Google’s** marketing effort goes to the off-line media to state its case and lure new customers. Off-line — sounds oxymoronic given **Google’s** firm lack of interest in that territory.

Your Links:

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/movies/south-by-south-west-dimmer-view-of-digital-connections.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=beautifully%20moving%20parts&st=cse

<http://www.econtentmag.com/Articles/News/News-Item/Springer-Acquires-12-Open-Access-Journals-from-Hindawi-74295.htm>

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/15/business/media/15libraries.html?_r=1&src=busln

<http://www.hathitrust.org/>

<http://www.gonegoogle.com/>

<http://dbpedia.org/About>

<http://www.executablepapers.com/>

<http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/e-textbooks-get-a-boost-from-publishers/>

Where the Wild Things Are: eBooks...

With holiday buying season — and that time of the New Year when the e-product cycle takes off — well, things around eBooks got wild.

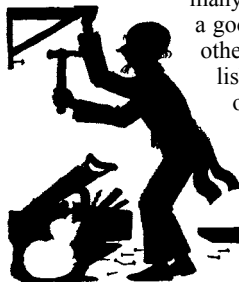
We have, in no particular order, **iPad 2**, **Kindle 3G**, **Nook Color**, **Lendle**. Let’s dive in.

iPad 2 — **Steve Jobs** recently stepped back on the **Apple** stage to introduce the world to the next **iPad** — the deuce. Imagine the anointed present tweeting or blogging the event on their **iPad** unos. Their current **iPads** must have felt heavy in hand as they calculated the cost of getting the much thinner, lighter, and sexier device — not in their hands but on stage in the hand of **Mr. Apple**.

How thin can you get with these things? **Jobs** was all smiles as he went on about the same cost but lighter machine which now carried two cameras. You can’t talk with them yet; a little larger than a college-ruled notebook, the **iPad** as smartphone would look rather heavy-handed and lame.

For those buying and reading books on the **iPad**, however, there was not so nice news. **Apple** now will not approve apps that don’t highlight the **Apple I Bookstore** first before any others. **Apple** first turned down the **Sony App** and likely the **Kindle**. This story has yet to play out.

Kindle 3G — **Amazon**, not to be left standing without innovation, launched the **Kindle 3G** — the third generation. Like the **iPad**, it is slimmer, sleeker, available in Dell gray. Most notable, there are two versions with a Wi-Fi version that prices in at \$139.00. Now if you had access to some wireless connectivity to the Internet, you could download at will those **Kindle** books that now range from free to about \$15.00 with many at the long-standing \$9.99. **Amazon** is doing a good job at keeping this price, while **Apple** and others yield to the agency pricing model — publisher sets price. This typically means a \$15.00 or higher priced title.



Nook Color — Did we mention many **Borders** are closing? It may be because they don’t have **Nook**. **Nook** is **Barnes and Nobles** e-reader which features **Kindle** size and **iPad** color graphics — well, almost. It is a nifty package and many **Kindle** users might be slightly jealous that **Nook** gives you great magazine layouts — like the **iPads** but at half the price.

On the downside, some found performance sluggish and the interface not as intuitive as it could be. Hmm... it’s got 3G and Wi-Fi connectivity, it’s got color — it just isn’t **Amazon** or **Apple**.

Oh, but you can read your library books on them — if and when you can find them. And figure it out.

E Shelf Life — **E Shelf Life** is a new e-publishing policy which puts a cap on the number of times an eBook can be lent. **HarperCollins** announced in March that its eBooks, purchased by libraries, would be control managed for twenty-six checkouts. This is a licensing and technical move. Hate to be the 27th in line...

Public libraries, especially those in business with **Overdrive**, are irked by this especially in hard economic times. Whether **HarperCollins’** move will be popular among other publishers remains to be seen.

In this zone, **Lendle**, an eBook lending management company has opened shop. Its main partner is **Amazon**. **Lendle** will manage the **Amazon Kindle** books for which publishers will allow some lending.

These developments, at first blush, don’t seem attractive to libraries. However they may foreshadow a developing interest in publishers to address lending of eBooks in a library environment. After all, the library market is a trailing market, the day after Mardi Gras, the moment when the fireworks are over and business wonders — how can we extract just about all profit from our labor?

Paywalls Going Up — Although the book industry is not the newspaper industry (sad or glad?), a development at the **Grey Lady** should raise eyebrows. **Ben Sulzberger**, the *New York Times* publisher, announced without much ceremony, subscription plans for the newspaper of record that everyone thought was dead. Well, not dead but doomed. It seems like only **Murdoch’s** financial papers and the *Financial Times*, another business wonder, were the only former newspaper products that reader customers would pay for. And pay again and again — a new invoice for each platform. These guys are doing well, not laying off in the editorial and reporting departments, and beaming out print, online, mobile versions — happily skipping to the offshore bank.

The *New York Times* will no longer be free except for the front and section pages. Free use will be limited to 20 downloads a month — you will need to tell them who you are — and you will only get free online if you subscribe to the full online or variations of the weekly delivered copy. If you are one of these customers you’ve, of course, registered already. And they’ve already cleared you for total access. @Bunning has Sunday-only delivery — the entitlement is free browser access.

It’s unclear what the archives access and costs will be for the individual subscriber. Libraries are scrambling to prepare for the free-birds who will now need our gracious subscriber stipends.

Oddly, users who get to a *Times* story through a blog, twitter, or social networking site will read that linked title free — with no metered

continued on page 59

Column Editor: **Donna Jacobs** (Research Specialist, Transgenic Mouse Core Facility, MUSC, Charleston, SC 29425) <jacobsdf@musc.edu>



When I was young, going on safari seemed like the most exotic thing you could do. Maybe this idea came from watching **John Wayne** ride on the side of a jeep through the plains of Tanzania in *Hatari* or admiring the richly-detailed photographs published in *National Geographic*; either way I still have a safari on the “to-do” list. In the meantime, I have recently taken a literary safari of Africa, which is more affordable. My guides were **V.S. Naipaul** in *The Masque of Africa: Glimpses of African Belief* and **Ryszard Kapuściński** in *The Shadow of the Sun*.

Before we embark on our safari, I would like to tell you how I got started on this particular literary journey. If you have been a follower of this column you will know about my book-loving friend, **Joy**, who resides in Eleuthera, Bahamas. The recommendation to check out **Ryszard Kapuściński’s** *The Shadow of the Sun* came via her. And although I have read two previous works (*The Bend in the River* and *The Enigma of the Arrival*) by **V.S. Naipaul**, *The Masque of Africa: Glimpses of African Belief* was recently reviewed in the Sunday edition of *The Post and Courier*, the local newspaper in Charleston, SC, by an old classmate. Seemed necessary to pick up the new work and explore it, which led me right down a narrow African alley and the connection to the work of **Ryszard Kapuściński**.

@Bunning: People & Technology from page 58

consequences. Surely, the hackers among us will figure the bit torrent solution to free-for-all with this loophole. Whether libraries will brave the illegality of gaming the loophole — who knows, it’s wild!


Your Links:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/03/technology/03apple.html>

<http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/News-Breaks/Amazon-Raises-the-Stakes-in-Your-Reading-Experience-The-Platform-War-Continues-74056.asp>

http://blogs.computerworld.com/17913/ipad_2_vs_android?source=CTWNLE_nlt_pm_2011-03-03

<http://blog.libraryjournal.com/annoyedlibrarian/2011/03/02/publishers-have-met-the-enemy-and-it-is-them/>

<http://mashable.com/2010/12/30/kindle-lending-how-to/> 

V.S. Naipaul, a native of Trinidad, won the **Nobel Prize** in Literature in 2001 “for having united perceptive narrative and incorruptible scrutiny in works that compel us to see the presence of suppressed histories.” A recent biography of **V.S. Naipaul** paints a somewhat different and monstrous picture of race, sex, and cruelty. Most of us outsiders only see the beauty created in his words, a few more intimate companions have the privilege of knowing a cruel hand and a tart quip.

Ryszard Kapuściński, a native of Poland, was the only foreign correspondent for the Polish Press Agency with the responsibility of covering 50 countries. His career in journalism began after attending university in Warsaw and carried him throughout the developing world observing the end of European colonialism. **Kapuściński** arrived in Africa in 1957. He was to begin his affair with this country as colonial rule was beginning to dissolve. The book is a work of journalism with a feel of fiction and, by some scholars’ view, more fiction than fact.

Maybe one would not immediately think to join the works of these two authors, but with respect to their writings on Africa, I found a remarkable equality of observation. While **Kapuściński’s** work is a compilation of his adventures as he is reporting from Africa, **Naipaul** has a specific quest in mind. He is exploring African belief, the taboo surrounding it, where did the beliefs arise, how have they been influenced by Western religions, the cruelty, the bigotry, the witchcraft, and what is to be made of it. **Naipaul** speaks of the influence of the missionaries, the fear of the Western world to understand the black magic of Africa, his impressions of the colonial settlements. **Kapuściński** strives to avoid the typical Western enclaves in exchange for the bright, sandy, sometimes dangerous huts of the natives and seeks to uncover the real Africa.

Both find a way to capture the minute and the mundane and make it vibrant, and exotic. This reader wanted to find the saw-marked timber of the stairwell, the **Hewlett Packard** laptop in the chief’s house, the bench on the side of the sandy road, the intense light of an unshaded desert, the corrugated sheet metal homes of Monrovia. Yet, neither book is without its description of the vast natural beauty of Africa. The animals of the Serengeti plains, and the Sezibwa waterfall in the Mukono district of Uganda are two amazing visuals that entertain us.

Sidebar thought, sorta like stopping at a desert oasis: I own a hardback version of *The Shadow of the Sun* and I own an electronic **Kindle** version of *The Masque of Africa: Glimpses of African Belief*. While

immersed in the two perspectives of Africa I am also immersed in the two perspectives of reading styles.

The hardback version allows me to see the book in total, hold it, touch it, embrace the dynamics of the page. It is littered with post-it notes to remind me of passages that spoke to me. The electronic version is fun, new, alive in the sense I can easily take it everywhere with me (as well as all the other books stored on the device). The feature I am currently enamored with is highlighting. I can easily search and retrace my steps along my safari.

No discourse on Africa would be complete without a perspective on race, and this subject was also in the forefront of both of their minds. **Kapuściński**: “In the disturbed, paranoid world of racial inequality, in which everything is determined by the color of one’s skin (calibrated by shades of differences), my illness, while physically incapacitating, had an unexpected benefit. Rendering me weak and defective, it diminished my prestigious white status — that of someone formidable, untouchable — and put me on a more even footing with the black man. Now a diminished, disowned, white man, I could be treated with familiarity, although I was still a white man. A warmth entered my relations with **Edu** and **Abdullahi**. It would have been unthinkable had they met me as a strong, healthy, imperious European.”

Naipaul: “In Trinidad we had overcome some of the effects of history. We had a distinguished group of black professionals; their children reflected the confidence of their parents. We were able, without trouble, to distinguish these people from the general black population. Black and ordinary, black and distinguished: we carried the two ideas in our head, and it could even be said that their blackness added to the distinction of the distinguished.”

Finally, in the Land where creation began, **Kapuściński** observes: “As if one were witnessing the birth of the world, that precise moment where earth and sky already exist, as do water, plants, and wild animals, but not yet **Adam** and **Eve**, it is this world barely born, the world without mankind and hence also without sin, that one can imagine one is seeing here.....It was still night, but Africa’s most dazzling moment was approaching — the break of day.” While **V.S. Naipaul** asks his guide **Phillip** about the “idea of possibility in society”: “In my view the idea of possibility has to do with humanity.” Thus we are left with our beliefs and the hope for humanity. 